



In my lonely quest to get people interested in [Proposition 21](#), I've written other posts about it, and tried to answer objections. But one objection, usually offered by Republicans, deserves a closer look, because addressing it means that Republicans should vote for Proposition 21 even if one accepts their premises about the Legislature and the budget.

[Proposition 21 would impose an \\$18-per-year addition to the state's Vehicle License Fee, and create a trust fund for the state's beleaguered park system.](#) It would also end all parking and user fees at state parks. Unsurprisingly, Republicans balk: we like state parks, too, they say, but the Legislature will just use the money currently budgeted for parks on other things, defund the parks, and leave us right back where we started. Put another way, they argue, this isn't a "parks" initiative at all: just a way to give more money to the Legislature.

Now, that's wrong as an empirical matter, because the \$500 million to be raised by Proposition 21 far exceeds the \$130 million the parks currently get (down from \$200 million in previous years). But there is a bigger reason why, if you're a Republican, you shouldn't fall for this. Here's why:

Whenever there is a big state budget deficit — which is to say, always — Republicans say they want to cut spending. Democrats refuse, but they usually cite popular programs like state parks. "Don't cut our parks!" they say.

Proposition 21 gives Republicans an answer to that: "don't threaten us with that," they will be able to say. "You know very well that state parks have their own dedicated revenue source. You're just defending welfare recipients." Republicans usually complain that Democrats *pretend* to protect popular things for the middle-class but actually cut anyway and protect their favored constituencies like welfare recipients and public sector unions. From the Republican perspective, Proposition 21 gives their party a chance to unmask the Democratic shell game. In other words, Proposition 21 is part of an effort to give Republicans the budget battle that they say they want: between entrenched Democratic constituencies and hard-working California taxpayers.

Now, if I were a cynic, I would say that some Republicans reject Proposition 21 for the precise converse reason I adduced here: they want to force the Democrats to choose

between the poor and the middle class. My inner cynic would notice that whenever it comes to budget cutting time, they force cuts not with regards to entrenched constituencies [but rather](#) against [low-income children](#). Put another way, they will not vote for any benefits for the middle class until the Democrats cast off the poor. But I'm not going to say that. I'm just going to say that the if the GOP really wants to force the issue about wasteful government in front of the voters, supporting Proposition 21 should be right up their alley.